Will We Ever See an Easleyville?

By Michael Hill

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In the Carolinas, to find the town of Easley, you have to go south into the Palmetto State, South Carolina. This leads me to consider if North Carolina will ever see a town named for its present governor, Michael F. Easley. If the past is any measure, it seems unlikely. The simple matter is that most places—towns and counties—were named long ago, and renaming is highly unlikely.

Today, former chief executives are more likely to see a stretch of highway, a dormitory, or a horse arena named in their honor. Developers of some subdivisions, such as Governors Club in Chatham County, have named their streets for state leaders. Of the governors in the twentieth century, none have towns named for them. Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs bears the name of Governor O. Max Gardner. Mental hospitals are named for Governors J. Melville Broughton and R. Gregg Cherry. Even though his term in office lasted only twenty-two months, John B. Umstead has had a state park and a hospital named for him.

The situation differs when we consider governors before 1900. Eleven existing counties are named for governors: Hyde, Johnston, Rowan, Martin, Caswell, Burke, Ashe, Davie, Swain, Graham, and Vance. Martin was created in honor of royal governor Josiah Martin. According to *The North Carolina Gazetteer*, its name very likely would have been changed were it not for the popularity of subsequent governor Alexander Martin, who served two terms in the 1780s.

Three former counties—Archdale, Dobbs, and Tryon—were named for colonial governors. Archdale was changed to Craven in 1712, and with separation from the British Empire, proud North Carolinians could not bear to suffer the names of Dobbs and Tryon on the state map. However, Archdale does survive as a town name in Randolph County, as does Tryon in Polk County.

In fact, the former Dobbs County has been twice renamed, as Russell Koonts writes in this issue of *THJH*. The current Greene County was once named Dobbs County, for royal governor Arthur Dobbs. In 1791 that name was "expunged from our map," as historian Kemp Battle phrased it, and a new county was named to honor Secretary of State James Glasgow. Following allegations against Glasgow for land fraud, the name was changed in 1799 to honor General Nathanael Greene, a hero of the Revolutionary War battle of Guilford Courthouse. "Behold the reward of dishonesty and official corruption!" wrote Kemp Battle in 1903. Greensboro is also named for General Greene.

Other sizable towns named in honor of governors include Edenton (Charles Eden), Asheboro and Asheville (both for Samuel Ashe), Franklin (Jesse Franklin), Morehead

City (John Motley Morehead), and Graham (William A. Graham). Zebulon B. Vance, the state's Civil War governor and later a United States senator, was so popular that a county (Vance) and a town (Zebulon in Wake County) honor him.

Smaller towns named for chief executives include Jarvisburg (Thomas Jarvis), Stokesdale (Montfort Stokes), Dudley (Edward B. Dudley), and Scalesville (Alfred M. Scales). The choice of name to honor a governor did not guarantee the community's success. Martinsville (Alexander Martin), Johnstonville (Samuel Johnston), Spaightville (Richard Dobbs Spaight), and Manly (Charles Manly) failed to thrive and are now counted as former towns. Smithville, named for Benjamin Smith, has been called Southport since 1889. Perhaps Governor Easley, who keeps his permanent residence in Southport, can sympathize with Governor Smith.

As you read the articles in this issue of *Tar Heel Junior Historian*, see how the authors consider naming rites—how places in North Carolina have been named. The questions of whom we honor and how we choose shed light on our shared past. Author Kevin Cherry begins by looking at the making of William S. Powell's book *The North Carolina Gazetteer*, the unrivaled reference source for researching the origins of Tar Heel place-names. Other writers look at issues as varied as the names of colonial places, the official designation of highway names, trends in the naming of public schools, and more. Read further to discover interesting aspects about places in our state!

At the time of this article's publication, Michael Hill was supervisor of the Research Branch of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History and the editor of the ninth edition of the *Guide to North Carolina Highway Historical Markers* (Archives and History, 2001) and of the revised edition of *North Carolina Governors*. He served as the conceptual editor for this issue of *THJH*.